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ABSTRACT

This keynote address discusses the need for a new worldwide association for online education or, a congress of existing associations concerned with the Internet and education. The linguistic and cultural distance between Japan and Western countries is so great that mutual understanding can only be a matter of degree. Japanese language search engines and directories quickly yield many Web sites concerned with online education, but apparently in mainstream colleges and schools the Internet is no more than a supplement to courses for credit, not the means of delivery. Yasuhiko Hirao of the Kagawa Prefectural Education Center, an inservice training facility, endeavors to theoretically justify using the Internet in public schools while presenting experimental findings in published articles and at his Web site. There are two countervailing trends related to online education that can be projected statistically into the future. According to a vernacular economic daily, the number of computers in Japan connected to the Internet will rise from 12 million in 1998 to 32 million in the year 2001. This paper concludes by posing a question for online discussion: "What can be done to give those educated worldwide a brighter future online?" (AEF)

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VOLUNTARISTIC ONLINE EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE WITH JAPAN

A Keynote Address for the 1998
Teaching in the Community Colleges Online Conference

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ONLINE EDUCATION AS A NEW PROFESSIONAL DISCIPLINE

As Academia is reconstituted in cyberspace, online teaching could be developed into a professional discipline that upholds academic and ethical standards in the new Internet media. Online teaching would become a peer-regulated profession or pan-disciplinary global guild.

For this to happen, academic freedom will still be necessary to ensure that disinterested decisions are made with respect to education in the new media. A profession is based on the cumulative knowledge of full-time professionals, therefore many educators will need to make online teaching their living for there to be professionalism. A discipline cannot develop if online teaching is adjunct to the main professional duties of most practitioners, much less if they are adjuncts themselves to colleges or other organizations. That is to say, realistically, that online teaching needs to be valued the same as face-to-face teaching in the language of commerce.

Yet even so, online educators will be needed to supply online libraries and other sources of knowledge shared with others. Hence the inevitable province of voluntaristic online education. Practitioners' institutions also need to formally recognize the homework, preparation, networking and voluntarism that accompany

the development of a new discipline with rapidly changing technological requirements.

Unless people wish to experiment with technologically or economically led education, a vision must be set forth with clear objectives in cyberspace no less than in previous media. For unethical practices can be automated much more easily than ethical ones. Some of the crimes of the Century have resulted from the obedient misuse of the most advanced technological skills. A recent case was the Aum cult in Japan, where scientists, technicians and even a doctor practiced mass murder. Hence the indispensibility of tenured faculty members who can be disinterested with regard to the uses of this specialized knowledge.

To steer any high technology to the benefit of humanity calls for equally high ethics, which have been upheld highest historically by those who took to heart a core education in the humanities. This is not to suggest an unrealistic separation of education and economics, but rather to advocate checks and balances between colleges and businesses, faculty and administration, so that, rather than one pillar subverting the other, education and prosperity can be mutually reinforcing.

Where credentials are conferred, the role of all teachers sooner or later will be contingent upon the evaluation by educators in each specialization of the reliability of sources of knowledge available online. With the vast array of sources to select from in each field already, again the time demands on conscientious educators will be increasingly great. The institutions and societies that benefit from these efforts should therefore reward them correspondingly.

To work for professionalism in a new discipline, among the domains that need to be addressed are teacher training, in-service educator development, accreditation of online educational programs, and systematic communication among practitioners as well as with their surrounding societies. This communication needs to be coordinated

to be effective, and by an independent scholarly organization. A framework for consensus is needed to apply academic rigor to online information and programs while promoting the collaboration and professional development of online educators.

This TCC-L online conference provides a forum to discuss such issues, and other venues are also grappling with similar issues, but the networks need to be brought together. This keynote address aims not to set out a mandate but rather to spark a dialogue among participants as to what can be done by whom. Therefore please join in the prioritizing of objectives and help build a consensus on how to develop this 21st Century discipline.

The above considerations point to the need for either a new worldwide association for online education or else a congress of existing associations concerned with the Internet and education. However, many organizations founded before the worldwide turn to cyberspace are hampered by their very substantiality. Costly print publications, in-person conferences and executive meetings require substantial membership dues. The geographical limits of such academic organizations are often reflected in names starting with "American" or "National," which are problematical internationally. Whereas freed of the encumbrances of physical products and travel, a world association for online education can now be conceived, one that recognizes the intelligence and aspirations of all humanity.

Discussion Points

Rather than this presenter naming organizations at this stage, or proposing new organizations without knowing who in the world would get involved, a clearer picture might emerge from extensive discussions of the pertinent issues. Therefore please briefly describe professional organizations having to do with the Internet and education. How well are they equipped for the rapid changes of the 21st Century? What can educators do,

for example, if they cannot join more than two or three organizations with annual dues? Yet how can online teaching become better organized and peer-regulated to merit credibility in global educational circles? Please contribute to the conference forum discussions during and after the online conference or via e-mail anytime to steve_mc@ibm0.kagawa-jc.ac.jp.

GLOBAL AND MULTICULTURAL ONLINE EDUCATION

A new global paradigm for education in the coming Century is only beginning to emerge. It could scarcely have been predicted until the advent of the Internet that the world would be brought together by non-governmental ambassadors.

This globalism is not just a concept to revalorize taken-for-granted geographical, cultural or linguistic defaults. Instead cyberspace provides an unprecedented meeting place for people from nearly every country, plus information about those not yet represented. Rather than non-Westerners serving as just an audience, the voice that they always had will now be raised on the world stage. The future will thus be a co-creation of Westerners and non-Westerners.

How will various cultures be reflected in computer-mediated communications? Furthermore, how can each culture be represented so that cyberspace becomes a level playing field for multilateral justice and world reconciliation?

Certain leading non-Western nations such as Singapore have already developed a Net infrastructure along with public policies and educational critiques (Tan, 1997). While this presentation will have to be confined to Japan, e-mail contributions to the conference forums or to steve_mc@ibm0.kagawa-jc.ac.jp concerning the Internet and education in various non-Western countries would be most welcome. Discussions could tie in this keynote or other 1996-98 presentations for comparison and theory-building.

THE FUTURE WITH JAPAN

The linguistic and cultural distance between Japan and Western countries is so great that mutual understanding can only be a matter of degree. Unknown areas need to be filled not with projections and unverified generalities but rather with tolerance and goodwill. The cultural traditions of Japan and the U.S. in particular developed without mutual influence and happen to be nearly poles apart in common sense assumptions on many issues.

Yet although Japan is enigmatic to Westerners and Asians alike, it has a self-consistent way of life, albeit conveyed in mostly unspoken ways. Often struck by sudden natural calamities, Japanese people have tended to value security, not surprises, therefore their projections about the future in their relatively stable system can be quite accurate. This applies not so much to what is expressed strategically to the outside world in English as to what is directed to Japanese people in Japanese, therefore original sources will be translated here.

History also repeats itself, cycles of inflation or hubris followed by disilllusionment or implosion, but never forced systemic change from without. Over millenia the surrounding seas allowed cultural transmission, but were rough enough so that Japan was never colonized. Twice Mongol invasions were thwarted by typhoons called "kamikaze," which reinforced the ideology that Japan was special. The very name of Japan in Chinese characters, Nihon or Nippon, can be interpreted as origin of the sun. While Japan was pre-literate, the name first appeared in the 3rd Century Record of Wei, so perhaps the Chinese invented the name. Japan was to the east where the sun rises, and there might have been an almost Rousseauvian view of Japan by lettered Mandarins. But then early rulers of Japan, who had close advisors from the Mainland if not originating there themselves, possibly adopted the flattering name from China to legitimize their authority.

This is mentioned because again in the 70s and 80s, the literature abroad that portrayed Japan flatteringly as the top nation was adopted at a time of identity politics to reinforce domestic notions of unique excellence in the Japanese way of life. The myth was renewed that Japan could pick and choose from the outside world and prosper without having to fundamentally change. One manifestation is the attitude that foreign languages like English are not needed except for university entrance exams.

But how could there be nothing unique about "the Japanese" among East Asians, yet the nation is the world's second wealthiest? Many ancient traditions and artifacts have been snuffed out in other Asian countries, whereas Japan has been able to build on the legacy of Chinese aesthetics. Another accident of history was Japan's choice of the U.S. as an opponent in WWII. Immediately after the surrender, U.S. forces rushed in to save the public from starvation, and the most enlightened occupation in world history may be the reason Japan became number two. It may not be entirely a secret even today: fight the U.S. and profit.

Yet the whole post-War generation worked so singlemindedly for material goods for the sake of their children that the nation is imploding culturally if not economically from the complacency of young people. A demographic implosion threatens educational institutions most of all. The birthrate of about 1.55 means that Japan's population will begin to decline, from the world's 7th now to the 20th most populous by the year 2050. Thus Japan is likely to join the middle ranks among nations.

Japan's Internet and Education Plans

The Website of the Economic Planning Agency of Japan reports on policies adopted at a Cabinet ministerial-level Council meeting on 18 November 1997. The English version does not mention anything about education, only the Japanese version (Economic Planning Agency, 1997), so here is my translation of the section on the digitization of

education:

> For the next adjustment of educational guidelines, during general study period at elementary schools, students will contact a foreign language, lifestyle and culture. With the globalization of communications, English can activate digital means such as the Internet. The networking of schools will be planned so that in the near future all schools will be connected to the Internet. By early in the year 2000 the goal is 22 computers per elementary school or one per two students [when it is the turn of a given class to use the computer lab], and 42 for every junior and senior high school or one per student, plus sufficient educational software. Fundamental information education will be required in junior high schools and as a curricular subject in senior high schools. Higher educational institutions will be able to confer credits for distance education courses utilizing multimedia, while university correspondence courses will be able to open graduate schools.

Japanese language search engines and directories quickly yield many Websites concerned with online education, but apparently in mainstream colleges and schools the Internet is no more than a supplement to courses for credit, not the means of delivery. Private vendors can take the next step after CAI cram schools and capitalize on the trendiness of the net, while Websites by educators have to first justify the formal introduction of online education by researching its purported benefits. Private colleges are flexible as to in-class content, while national educational and research institutions are regulated by law. Public elementary and secondary schools follow a national standard curriculum to which private schools tend to conform because of standardized university examinations.

Thus Yasuhiko Hirao of the Kagawa Prefectural Education Center, an

in-service training facility, endeavors to theoretically justify using the Internet in public schools while presenting his experimental findings in published articles and at his Website (Hirao, 1998). His and most other Websites of this nature tend to use private providers because of the unofficial status of these experiments. The Japanese language tends to get awkward in the attempt to literally translate newly imported concepts such as cooperative learning, project work, active learning that is autonomous and self-aware, and the teacher as a facilitator empowering learners. From a distance through the Internet, furthermore, Mr. Hirao team taught a class of seventh graders at his former school. Although they were in their first year of learning English formally, the students were motivated by contacting the real world abroad and getting even perfunctory e-mail responses from Webmasters for Peanuts or the LA Dodgers.

Mr. Hirao's thesis starts from government statements closest to justifying this work, then he boldly experiments with good results. So this trend can be expected to continue, particularly because the Internet revitalizes the English reading and writing skills in which Japanese schools have greater confidence.

Isamu Shimazaki (1998) works with elementary school children as young as ten through the Kidlink Society, which offers mailing lists and Websites in 13 languages including Japanese. The Website of Akira Taniguchi et al. (1998) centers on the high schools around Osaka that are experimenting with the Internet in their classes, while their active mailing list on English education attracts leaders in higher education who have English Websites, such as Kojiro Asao (1998) and Kenji Kitao (1997).

Whether it is the news media or any other sector of society, people agree that this is just the beginning. The Net infrastructure is getting up to speed before anyone knows how it will ultimately be used or how it will affect the staid and hitherto venerable institutions regulating Japanese society.

Online Education and the Future with Japan

There are two countervailing trends related to online education that can be projected statistically into the future. According to a vernacular economic daily (Staff reporters, 1998), the number of computers in Japan connected to the Internet will rise from 12 million in 1998 to 32 million in the year 2001. But the Japanese Ministry of Education (Mombusho, 1998) projects that the number of students entering four-year colleges and universities will start to decline slowly from the peak of 586,690 in 1997, while junior colleges decline from their peak of 254,953 enrollees in 1993 to 177,206 in 1999. The nearly 500 junior colleges in Japan are predominantly private and for females, as families have invested more to place their sons in the better universities, but equality of the sexes is becoming an issue.

In one survey, albeit statistically unreliable, visitors to a Website in Japan in 1995 were 96% male, 80% under 35 years old, over 60% from the Tokyo area, and mostly with technical or scientific backgrounds (Drake, 1995). Nishijima (1996, my translation of the gist) states that women, who like to write and chat, hold the key to mass acceptance of the electronic media. The Internet calls for a youthful sense of play, a connectivity culture, freedom and self-expression. For this to happen the Japanese must go beyond materialism and break the mental habit that forces everyone to be the same. Pessimists argue that Japan could be isolated by its organizational ways even on the Internet. Inability to express themselves in written English will leave the Japanese as passive recipients of the world network.

Not much has changed to counter the pessimism expressed by the Japanese editor above. Millions of Japanese people communicate only with each other in Japanese on networks that use similar technology but are like tidepools to the great ocean of the Internet, tides that only rise with an extra fee. Here in a remote area of southwestern Japan, however, a young woman recently said, "I play

the Internet." The flow of Japanese voices out into the wide ocean of international communication will continue to be a relative trickle, but with nearly half the population of the U.S. and a quarter of them online in a few years, there will be great potential to reach individuals willing to come out of Japan's insularity and play.

Per capita online, in most other non-Western countries the results will probably be more satisfactory to Westerners. But despite recent media hype, the difference is that Japan still has vast wealth and a high average level of technical know-how among its 125 million people. Initiatives will probably still have to come from the outside world, but the problem of influencing non-Western people must be handled with the utmost intercultural sensitivity. The Internet infrastructure will be in place and cultures can work out their differences provided there is mutual respect. The future with Japan and the rest of the world will be what individuals in concert make it, and online education in the widest sense will play a key role.

What can be done to give those educated worldwide a brighter future online? Please contribute to the conference online conference discussions or e-mail steve_mc@ibm0.kagawa-jc.ac.jp. For further reading on Asian studies, multilingualism and educational technology, see the Bilingualism and Japanology Intersection. Thank you, conference staff and participants. -

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